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Le 11 mars 2012 en Suisse : limiter les résidences secondaires, les enjeux d'une votation

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# *The Swiss Vote on Limiting Second Homes*

Martin Schuler and Pierre Dessemondet

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Cartography : Benoît Le Bocey, Microgis, St-Sulpice

- 1 On 11 March 2012, in a popular vote, the Swiss population and the majority of the country's cantons gave their approval to an initiative proposed by ecologist Franz Weber calling for a halt on the construction of new second homes in communes where such homes already exceeded a threshold of 20% of total housing stock. While approval of this initiative was a surprise, the marked geographical split between regions accepting and refusing the proposal was at first felt as a real political bombshell, dividing lowland areas from mountain areas (the Alps), urban centres from tourist regions, and the economic core from peripheral areas.
- 2 Political, social and cultural differences mark every popular vote in Switzerland, dividing the electorate on the basis of opposition between Right and Left, modernism and conservatism, and, over recent decades, a technocratic vision and an ecological conscience. These differences have characteristic spatial expressions that have attracted the attention of political geographers for a number of years (Hermann, Leuthold, 2003).
- 3 The 550 popular votes organised by the Swiss Confederation since its creation in 1848 provide an extremely rich source for political analysis. Results are available for the entire period for the 26 cantons and half cantons, from 1920 for the 184 districts, and from 1981 for the communes. The political geography of Switzerland reveals a fairly consistent characteristic profile (Linder et al, 2008): the major cultural differences in the country based on faith and language are reflected in urban-rural distinctions and, more recently, differences between metropolitan regions and the rest of the country. With regard to the three natural regions, the Jura, the Plateau (Mittelland) and the Alps, they are seldom

marked by entrenched positions, given the spatial overlapping with other differentiating traits, which are often independent of one another and also superimposed. The distinction between protestant and catholic regions, which was clear during the 19th century, has now almost disappeared, while the urban-rural dimension, especially evident in the first half of the 20th century, has become modified with urban sprawl. Differences between linguistic regions have been important in the votes over recent decades. However, it is not uncommon to observe an event with a regional impact influencing the political alignment of a region, as was the case in the Jura in its fight to create a new canton or the two Basle cantons following their opposition to the Kaiseraugst nuclear power plant (Schuler, Dessemontet *et al.*, 2007).

- 4 The initiative to limit the building of new second homes was proposed against a backdrop of numerous political considerations. First, it received political support from the Green party and the Left. Second, the initiative reflected the opposition between ecology and economy, and defined an area whose economy would be potentially affected by its approval. Finally, the vote was also influenced by a certain “have/have-not” jealousy, expressed in an anti-foreigner component.
- 5 In this article, we analyse the very particular spatial expression of the vote and place it in the different regional contexts of the second home issue, and in particular the property and tourism markets. We also conduct an historical comparison with other votes on similar issues. By way of introduction, we begin with a brief review of some of the special characteristics of the tools of direct democracy in Switzerland.

## The Swiss system of referenda and initiatives

- 6 Direct democracy in the Swiss Confederation (and in the cantons and communes) involves three types of popular vote: the compulsory referendum on important decisions taken by the National Council (Lower House) and the Council of States (Senate), the optional referendum requested by 50,000 citizens to validate or overturn a decision of the two houses and, finally, the “initiative” supported by 100,000 signatures that can propose the introduction or modification of a constitutional article (Koller *et al.*, 2012).
- 7 For a compulsory referendum or an initiative to be accepted, the so-called double majority is required, i.e. it has to be accepted by a majority of votes at the national level and a majority of the cantons and half-cantons. However, in the case of an optional referendum, a majority of the electorate is sufficient to validate a proposal of the Parliament.
- 8 In practice, a wide range of issues may thus submitted to the vote, relating to agriculture, infrastructure, energy, or the armed forces, for example, or societal issues (family policies, rents, abortion) or international agreements. Even the most surprising themes can be the subject of a vote, such as the introduction of summer time (refused in 1978) or the ban on constructing minarets (accepted in 2009). When there is to be a vote, the Government, the Parliament and the different parties provide information and instructions. As regards party positions, the national party’s stance may even differ from that of the cantonal sections.
- 9 Voters express their opinions according to material interests, ideological considerations or convictions. Every issue submitted to voters has contradictory aspects, so that there may be a large number of undecided voters upstream of a popular vote. Hence the

importance of the information campaign conducted by protagonists and the financial means made available.

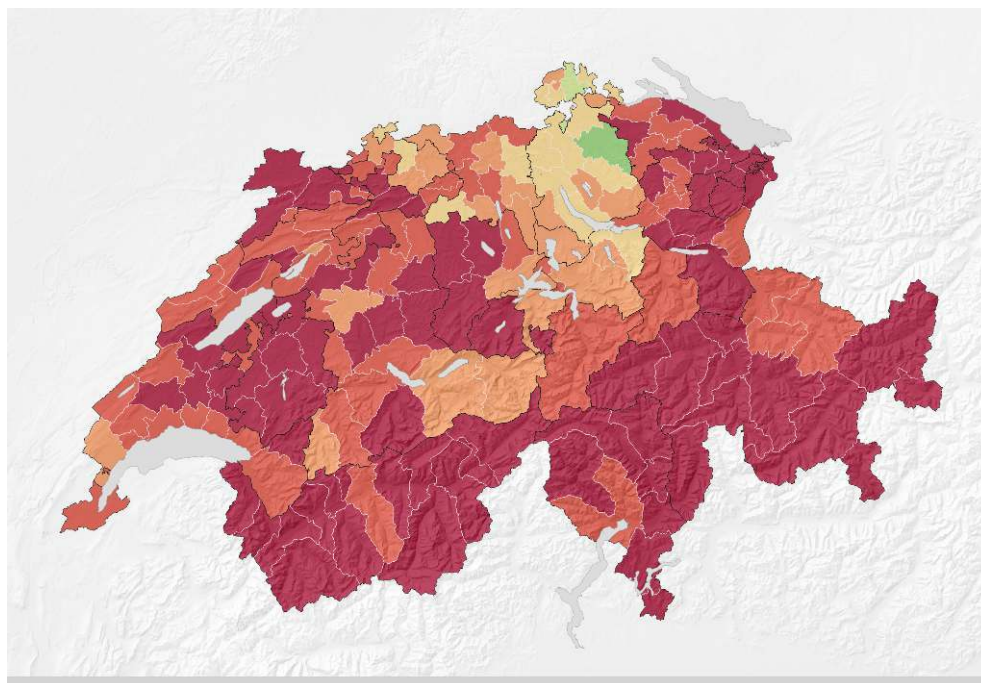
- 10 Coherence between decision-makers and the citizens concerned by a decision should be optimal, but this is not always the case, particularly if the subject of a vote is spatially limited or the economic or ideal impact concerns one region in particular. During the 20th century, Swiss politics developed a conscience about spatial inequalities and found ways of not disadvantaging peripheral and minority regions. Agricultural policy, regional policy and the system of financial equalization between the Confederation and the cantons may be cited as an expression of this desire for greater spatial equality. In more concrete terms, the building of two alpine tunnels (Lötschberg and Gotthard) was a reflection of the concern to avoid regional tensions, even at a high price.
- 11 In proposing an analysis of the popular votes on issues similar to that dealt with in this study, we outline the historical context of votes on planning and development, environmental protection, and intervention in the construction market.

## Contextual background: a history of Swiss votes concerning the territory

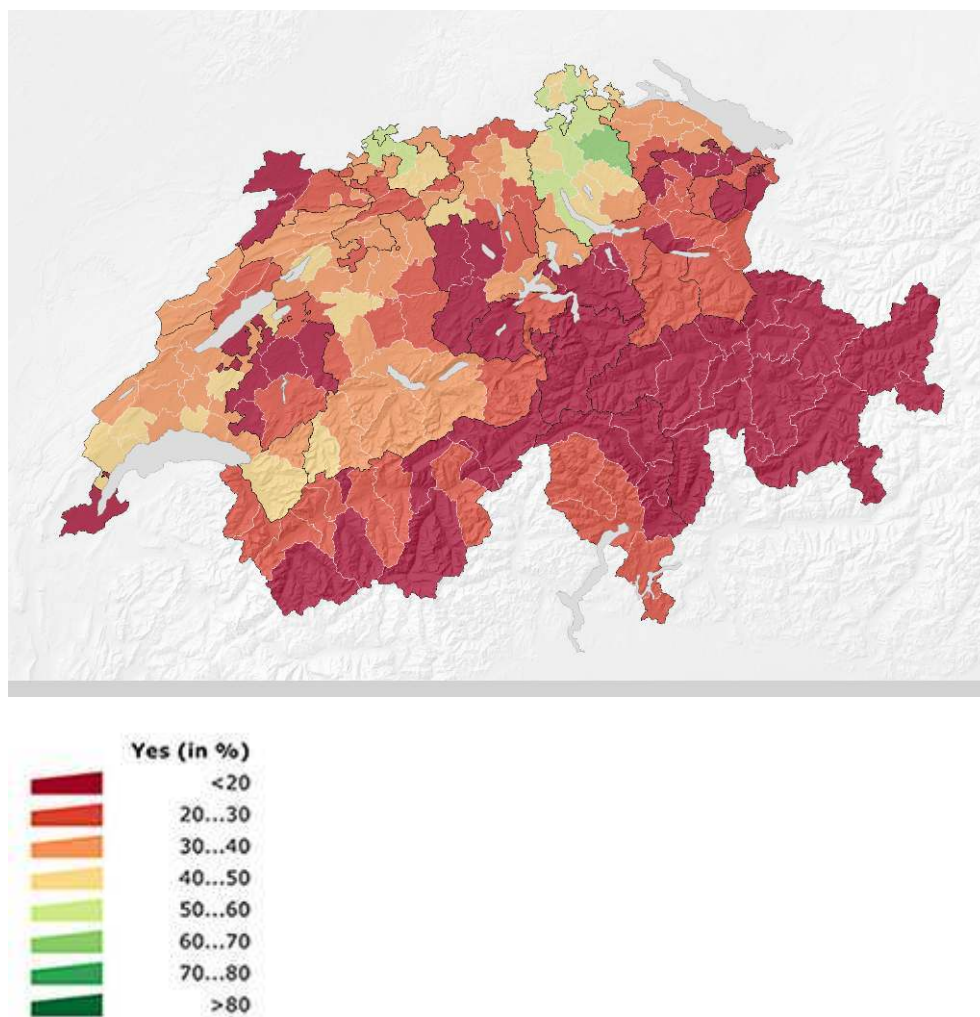
- 12 It is not uncommon for the same issue to be submitted to the population on more than one occasion. Nevertheless, a direct comparison of two polls is hardly applicable. In our context of tourism-related construction, several dimensions may be identified: the main concern expressed by the initiative is undoubtedly about preserving the landscape, but other aspects also play a role, such as the mechanisms underlying building and the acquisition of property (second homes) or the impact of construction on agricultural land and infrastructures. These are all themes that relate to land use planning, a discipline based on the principle of rational and economic use of land.
- 13 In the past, these issues have been the focus of several votes at the national level. At first glance, the votes on actual spatial planning and development are the most telling, but equally instructive are the votes aimed at protecting the landscape in general or concerning local intervention. Finally, the method and financing of agricultural policy are also closely related to the question of landscape. From a broader perspective, energy, transportation and mobility have always played an important role. In this type of national vote, two constellations of interest may be brought into conflict, with general ecological considerations on one side, and economic or society interests on the other, as manifest in the interest groups mobilised, for example, in any struggle to preserve a site threatened by a local infrastructure project. In practice, a large number of controversial projects never reach the voting stage, but pressure from entrepreneurs or opponents results in the project undergoing modifications.
- 14 The protection of water resources and the defence against over-intensive use of hydropower was the first environment-related issue to be submitted to a national vote. In 1953, the federal resolution introducing article 24d into the constitution, concerning the protection of water resources from pollution, was accepted by 81% of the electorate, with “yes” vote percentages ranging from 63% (Schwyz) to 98% (Geneva). The first initiative aimed at preventing the implementation of a local infrastructure project concerned the dam on the Rhine at Rheinau, which reduced the height of the falls near Schaffhausen by 2 metres. In the vote of December 1954, Schaffhausen was the only canton to support the

initiative, which was rejected by more than two thirds of the vote at the national level (map 1). Four years later, a similar issue had to be put to the vote since it concerned an international agreement with Italy and affected the only national park area in Switzerland, situated in Engadine. The project to build a dam on the Spöl River was accepted in 1958 by 75% of the electorate and by all the cantons (map 2). Between these two votes, in 1956, a popular initiative requesting the extension of popular rights during the granting of hydraulic concessions only obtained the support of 37% of the Swiss electorate (map 3).

**Map 1. 1954 vote : About the initiative for the Rhine valley protection from the Rhine Falls to Rheinau**

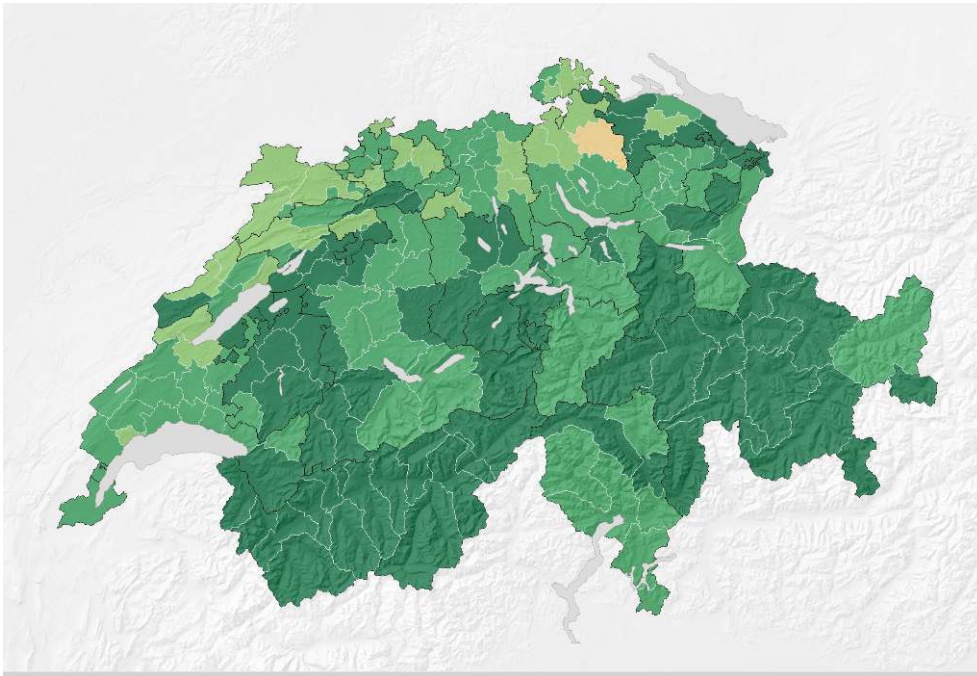


**Map 2. 1956 vote : About the initiative requesting the extension of popular rights during the granting of hydraulic concessions**





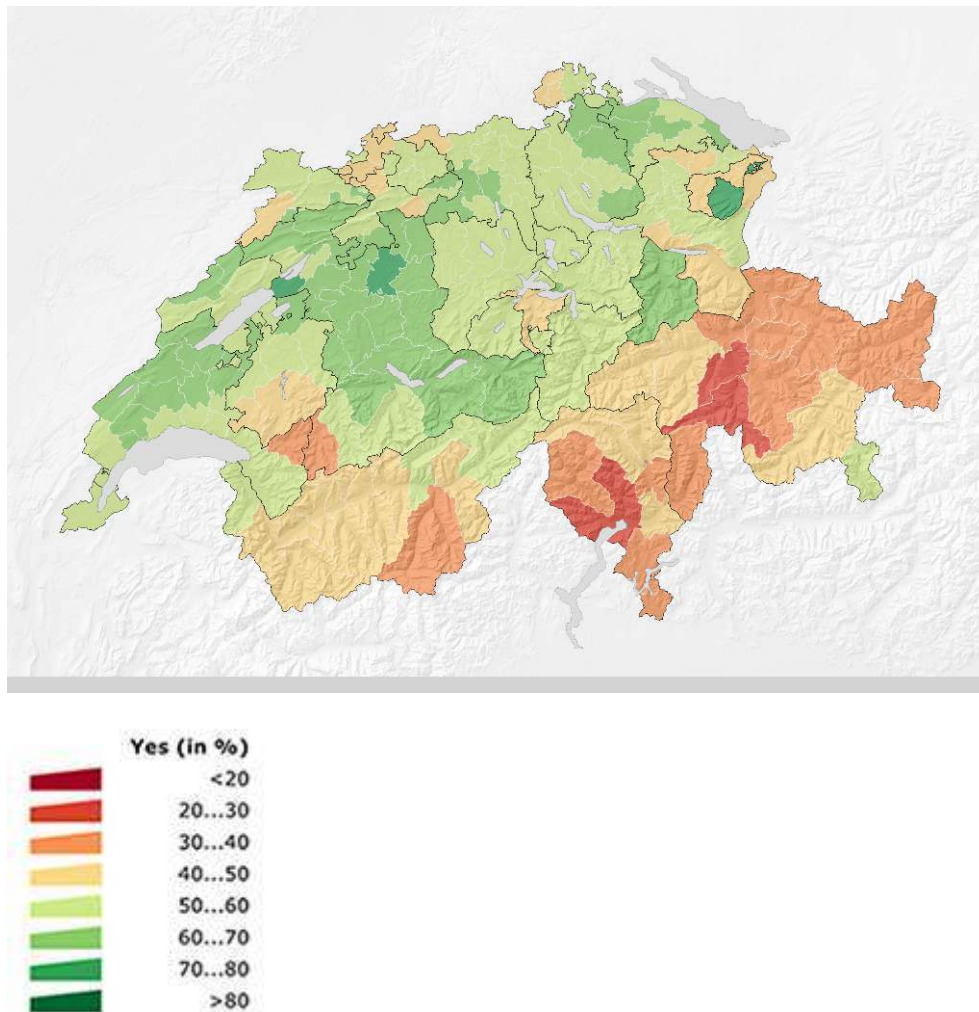
**Map 3. 1958 vote : About the ratification of a convention with Italy regarding the use of hydraulic power in the Spöl valley**



- 15 In the 1950s, the beginnings of environmental struggles resulted in clear defeats for their proponents. In the three votes cited above, the Zurich district of Winterthur was revealed to be the most sensitive to the question of environmental protection. At the cantonal level, Schaffhausen, Zurich and the two Basle cantons obtained the highest scores, while the alpine cantons were the most reticent. The association “Rheinaubund”, founded in Schaffhausen in 1960 and dedicated to protecting the aquatic environment, successfully launched a new article on the protection of the natural environment and the landscape. In a 1962 vote, the article obtained overwhelming support, with 79% of the electorate voting in favour at the national level and a majority in all the cantons, even though there were significant differences in the latter: the cantons of Geneva, Basel-Stadt and Vaud came out on top with more than 90% positive votes, while in Schwyz only 53% voted in favour of the initiative.
- 16 During the economic boom years of the 1960s, the problems of the construction market were reflected in several votes, such as those entitled “Measures against rising prices in the construction industry” (1965), “Against land speculation” (overwhelmingly rejected in 1967, except in Geneva) and “Constitutional provisions on the land law” (clearly accepted in 1969, except in Schwyz, Obwalden and Aargau). In the context of our comparison, the first vote is perhaps of most interest. It concerned a federal resolution introducing measures aimed at calming the overheated real estate market. While 58% of the electorate voted in favour at the national level, the major alpine cantons of Ticino (36%), Graubünden (39%) and Valais (46%) all rejected the proposal, as did Basel-Stadt (48%). This is the only time in voting history that there has been a similar political map to that of March 2012, showing a relatively high level of acceptance on the Plateau and a clear rejection in the Alps (map 4). However, in 1965 the national score was much clearer, and regional extremes less marked. The (negative) vote about the Land planning act in 1976 extended this spatial pattern. Rejected by the narrowest of margins (49% of “yes”

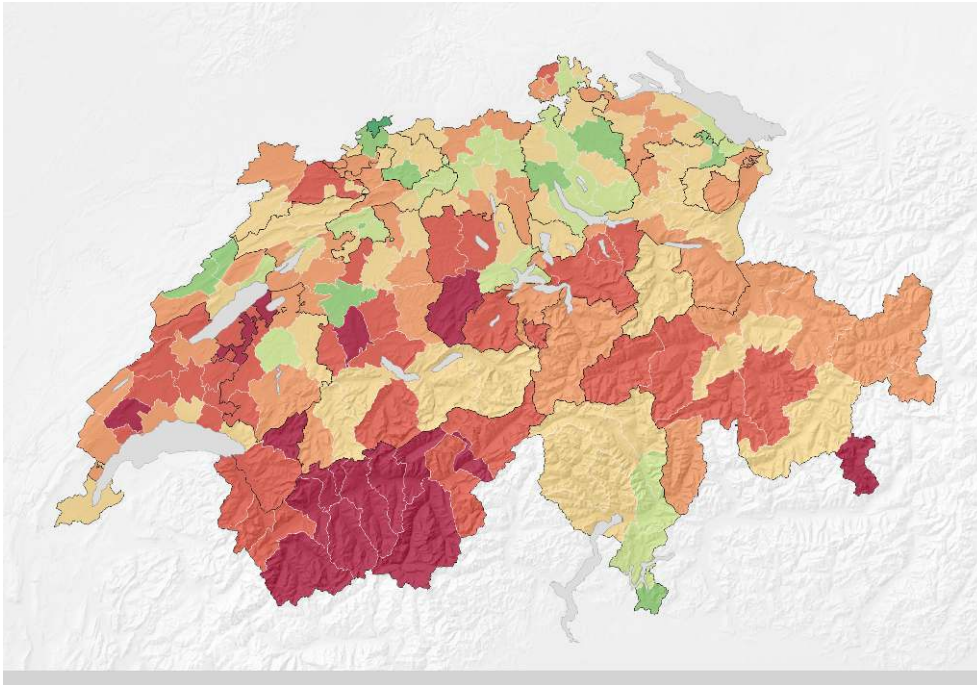
votes at the national level), the optional referendum was generally accepted in the urban cantons (Zurich, Basle), industrial cantons (Solothurn, Neuchâtel) and Ticino, but refused in the rural cantons (map 5). A second version of the Act came into force in 1980, this time without any referendum being called.

**Map 4. 1965 vote : About measures against rising prices in the construction industry**



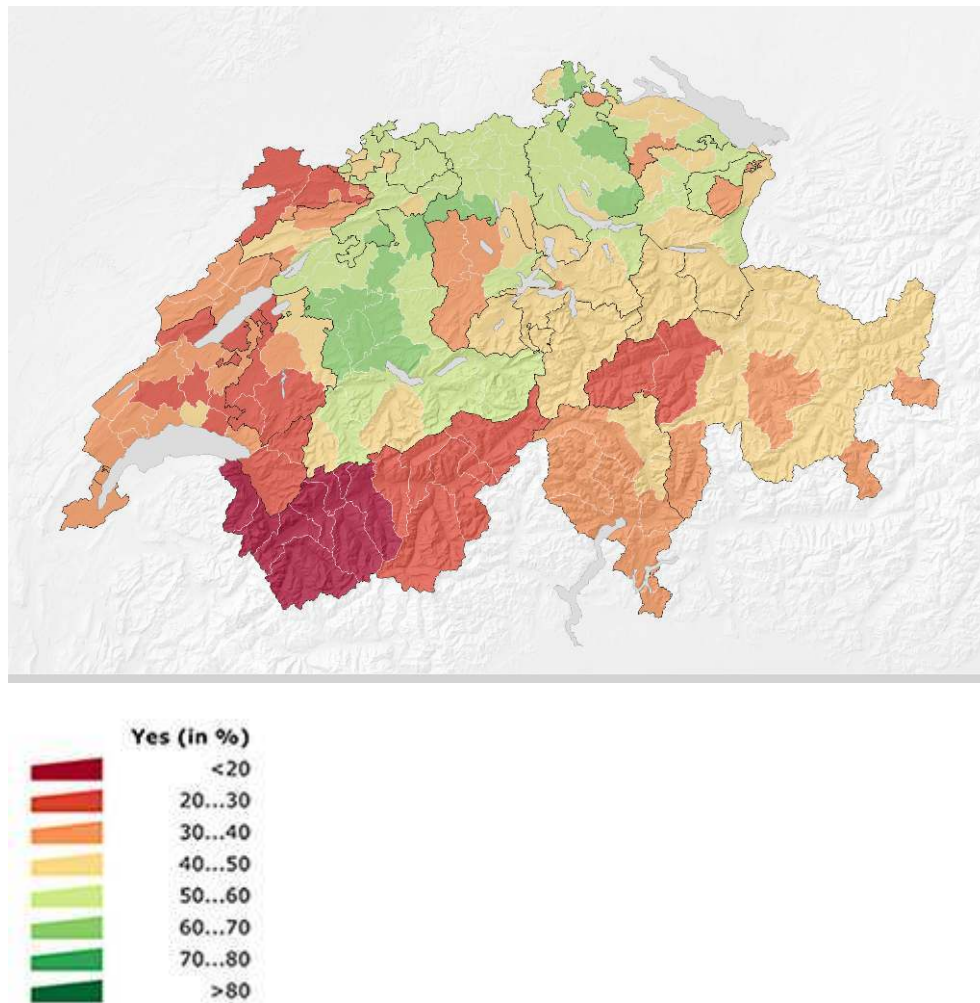


Map 5. 1976 vote: About the land planning act



- 17 Since 1980, however, numerous issues closely related to the subject of this study have been submitted to the Swiss electorate. The geography of the results has been extremely discordant, reflecting the complex tapestry of inter-dependencies relating to linguistic communities, urban life and the regional context. In non-chronological order, it is interesting to mention “Against the selling off of the nation’s land”, rejected in 1984 by a narrow margin (49% “yes” votes, map 6). This initiative, on an issue similar to that of the 2012 vote, followed on from a series of anti-immigration polls in the 1970s, since its aim was to prohibit the acquisition of land by persons living abroad. In debates, concerns about the landscape were clearly expressed. The proposal was easily defeated in the alpine cantons (only 16% in favour in Valais) and the pre-alpine cantons of central Switzerland, with the vote reflecting strong linguistic, centrality and faith components: the rejection by Latin, catholic and rural minorities proved decisive. A very similar theme, entitled “Property acquisition by persons living abroad” in 1995 was aimed at doing away with the constraints in force since the 1970s. With only 46% of votes in favour of the project, the constraints were not removed, despite strong support from the French-speaking Swiss (Valais 67%). The faith and centrality factors played a lesser role than in 1984. The alpine cantons in German-speaking Switzerland were also not very active, which ultimately allowed the German-speaking urban and industrial majority to carry the vote.

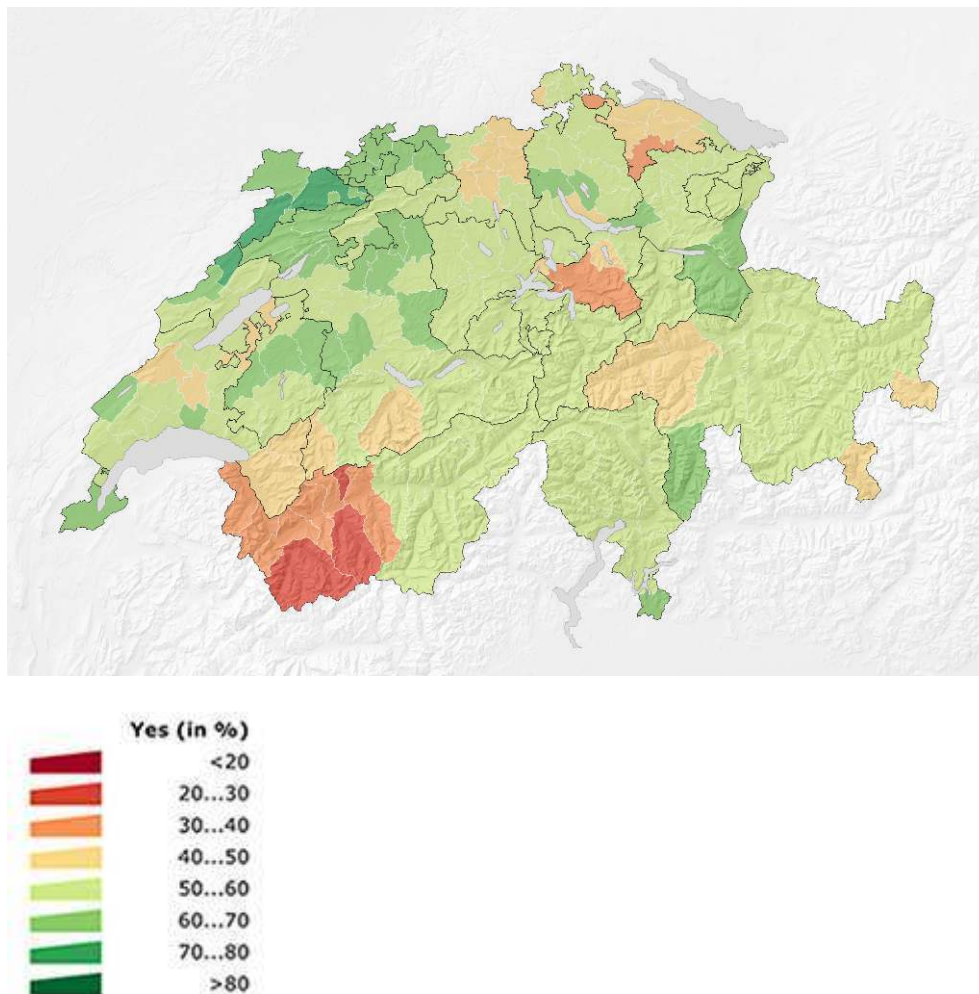
Map 6. 1984 vote : About the initiative against the selling off of the nation's land



- 18 In another domain, an initiative aimed at supporting small farms (1989) was almost accepted, obtaining 49% of the votes. This initiative, which called for the maintenance of a strong farm population and opposition to “animal factories”, revealed a marked urban-rural divide: Basel, Zurich, and Geneva, but also Ticino, accepted it, as did the industrial cantons (Solothurn, Schaffhausen, Glarus), while the alpine cantons (Valais 28%, Graubünden 41%) and the pre-alpine and French-speaking cantons (Vaud 30%) rejected it. Once again, the combination of multiple minorities just managed to carry the vote. In yet another field of activity, concerning the liberalisation of the energy market (2002), the French-speaking cantons, this time with support from eastern Switzerland, obtained a victory against the wishes of the “centre”, even though this region was also much divided. Two other initiatives worthy of analysis created considerable surprise when they were accepted. The so-called “Rothenthurm” initiative, accepted in 1987 with a score of 58% and a majority in 20 cantons (excluding Valais 39%, Schwyz 47% and Thurgau 49%), was originally aimed at preventing the construction of a military camp in a marshland area of a commune in the canton of Schwyz (map 7). It had to be formulated in a general manner and consequently proposed protecting all high marshland in Switzerland. The particularly high acceptance figures for an initiative of this type were attributed to the combined influence of environmental awareness (particularly acute in the 1980s), a

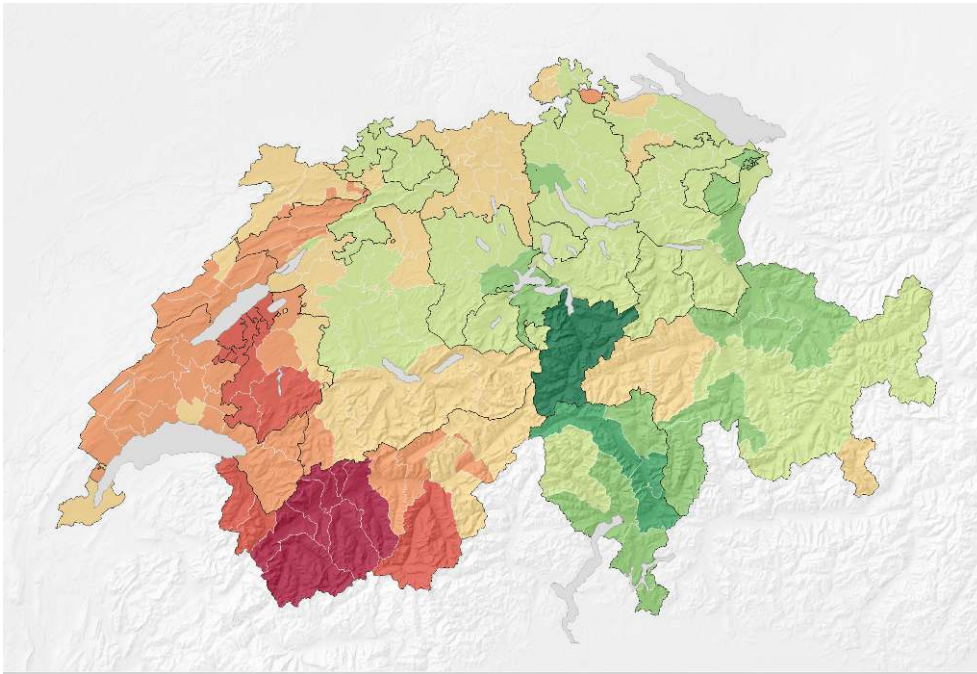
certain urban antimilitarism and the fact that the economic impact remained symbolic. As for the initiative on transit traffic in the Alps, accepted by a narrow margin (52%) in 1994, its cartography was more regional (map 8). The objective “for the protection of alpine regions against transit traffic”, involving the transfer of freight from road to rail, obtained 88% of favourable votes in the canton of Uri, 64% in Ticino and 59% in Graubünden, the three cantons affected by the Gotthard and San Bernardino autoroutes. Support from the rest of central Switzerland, eastern Switzerland, Zurich and Basle for this proposal finally managed to overcome the negative votes in the French-speaking cantons (Valais registered only 25% in favour, through fear of not being able to complete the construction of its own autoroute) and Aargau, regions that were more favourable to private transport. The success of this initiative is part of an historical process in the development of direct democracy that, since the 1990s, has tended towards a substantial increase in popular initiatives.

Map 7. 1987 vote : About the Rothenthurm initiative for the protection of the high moors





**Map 8. 1994 vote : About the Alps initiative for the protection of alpine regions against transit traffic**



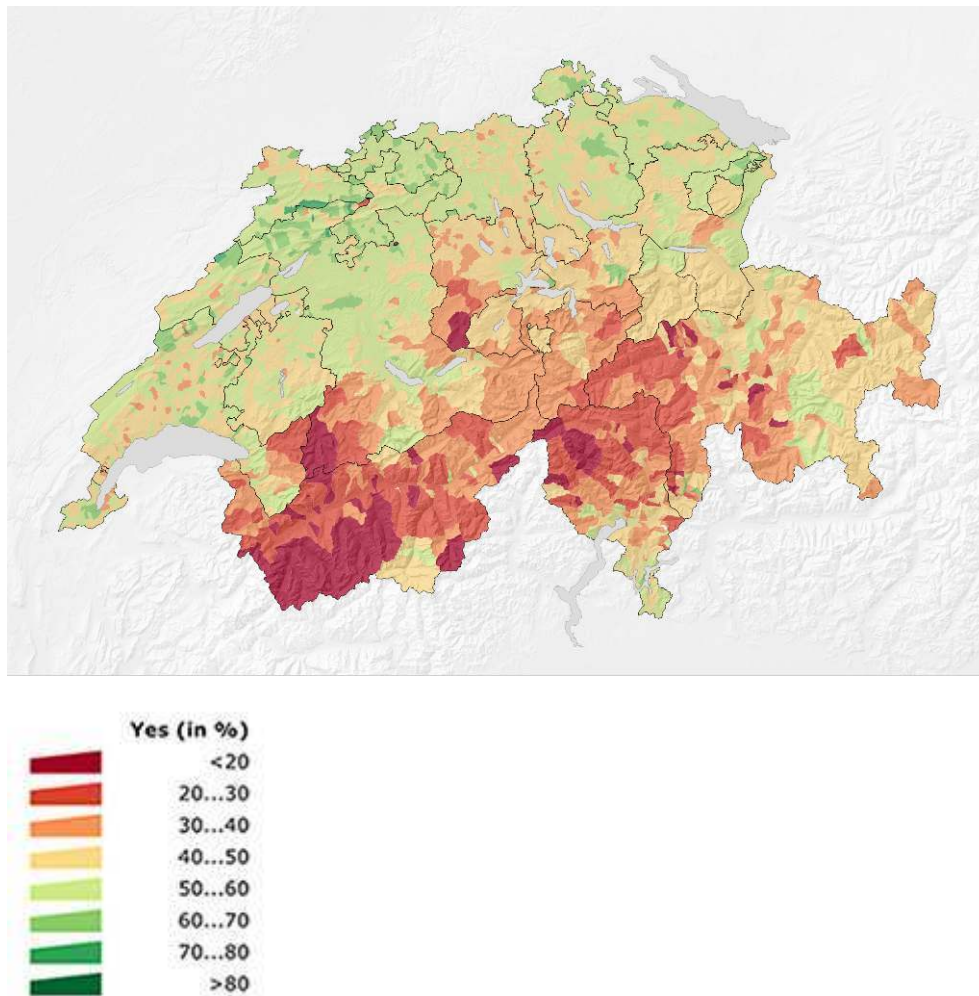
- 19 Analysis of past votes leads us to a series of conclusions: a marked difference between the results of the Plateau cantons and those of the Alps is relatively frequent in polls held on issues relating to territorial development, infrastructures, landscape protection and agriculture. In the past, however, the expression of convergent interests between the peripheral areas and the Latin language regions has very often enabled them to obtain victory at the national level. Only on two occasions, in 1965 and 2012, have the alpine cantons together lost a vote against the rest of the country.
- 20 In most of the cases analysed, the alpine cantons have not voted in the same way: the canton of Graubünden has shown itself to be more in line with government recommendations and more ecological than Switzerland (and the rest of the Alps), while Ticino has for a long time been more modern, more social and more favourable to planning measures, and central Switzerland more environmental. It has therefore been the Valais, and particularly French-speaking Bas-Valais, which has often found itself in the minority and misunderstood. Among the Alpine cantons, Valais has been the most dynamic region from both a demographic and economic point of view during the entire period of observation. It is thus its model of technocratic modernity that the rest of Switzerland, and particularly urban German-speaking Switzerland, is challenging.
- 21 The vote on 11 March 2012 may in effect be seen as heralding a change, a change in the balance of power between urban Switzerland and mountain Switzerland (always weaker from a purely quantitative viewpoint), but also a breakdown in solidarity, particularly within French-speaking Switzerland. On the other hand, the vote on second homes demonstrates, albeit not as forcefully as is usually the case, differences within the alpine cantons, differences in the perception of tourism development and in the opinions on options to take for the future. Such differing opinions, it would seem, proved decisive for the overall score, given the very moderate support for the initiative from urban Switzerland.

## The initiative “To put a stop to the invasive spread of second homes”

- 22 Usually, a popular initiative is launched by a party or strong organisation that is able to collect signatures and finance the campaign. Franz Weber has the particular characteristic of not belonging to any group or any traditional association. However, he is able to call on his own foundation. Active for almost 50 years, he has led a large number of campaigns, often in the face of fierce resistance. The fight to preserve the hamlet of “Surlej” (1965-72) in Upper-Engadine was his first political success. This was followed by a campaign to protect the Lavaux vineyards, won following a favourable vote in the canton of Vaud (1977). At the international level, Weber has also been very active, ensuring, for example, the preservation of Delphi (1979) when it was threatened by a project to introduce heavy industry in the vicinity. An initiative against the construction of a section of autoroute between Wimmis in the Bernese Oberland and Sion in Valais, which figured in the 1960 autoroute programme, did not have to be submitted to the popular vote because the parliamentary Houses decided to follow its recommendations (Bulletin Officiel de l'Assemblée Fédérale 1986/III, pp. 512-7). For Franz Weber, now 86 years old, the 2012 vote has meant new public recognition.
- 23 The initiative of Franz Weber “To put a stop to the invasive spread of second homes” calls for a ban on new second homes in communes where the proportion of such homes already exceeds 20% of total housing stock. The text, which was considered to comply with the constitution, was debated in both Houses. The National Council recommended its rejection by 123 votes to 61, while in the Council of States, the result was 29 against 10. In a context of wider debates on the future of land use planning in Switzerland, the initiative of Franz Weber met with a lukewarm response. It was considered too extreme and therefore with no chance of achieving the necessary score in a popular vote. After heated debates, particularly in the cantons of Valais and Vaud, it was submitted to a vote on March 11 2012. While the ecologist parties and the Left supported the initiative, other parties recommended its rejection.
- 24 It was therefore with a feeling of astonishment that Switzerland greeted the news of its acceptance, albeit by the narrowest of margins. With a participation rate of 45%, which is about average for recent years, 50.6% of voters opted for a “yes” at the national level. At the cantonal level, 13 and half cantons, all situated in the Jura or on the Plateau, accepted it, while 9 and a half cantons, all situated in the Alps and Pre-Alps, rejected it. A map of the vote, the usual way of showing results in the media, was issued on the evening of the poll showing a country divided in two along a line running from east to west at the foot of the Pre-Alpes (map 9, by communes). However, despite this clear split, the cantonal results were not as divergent as they were in most of the votes cited in this article. Thus, the scores of 23 of the 26 cantons and half-cantons vary between 40% and 60% of positive votes; only Basel-Stadt (62.3% of “yes” votes), Uri (38.6%), and above all Valais (26.2%), deviate significantly from the mean.



Map 9. 2012 vote : About the Weber initiative against the proliferation of holiday homes



- 25 A more detailed analysis of the spatial expression of the vote reveals very little difference in the scores between German-speaking Switzerland (51.6%) and French-speaking Switzerland (49.1%), a split often seen in the recent past. The percentage of “yes” votes is even lower in Italian-speaking Switzerland (45.7%), and particularly low in the Romansh-speaking communes of Graubünden (32.5%). Along another structuring divide, the historically protestant regions accepted the initiative with 54.0% of votes, while only 45.8% of the communes with a catholic majority supported the proposal. This observation, however, must be qualified, given that the population of the Alps is very largely catholic. Only the Bernese Oberland, the Alps of Vaud and Appenzell Ausserrhoden are historically protestant, while Glarus, St. Gallen and Graubünden are mixed.
- 26 A third distinction that is often striking in popular votes is that between large urban areas and the rest of the country, but this time it is dominated by a lowlands/Alps split. However, if we look at the typology of the communes, the central urban areas approved the initiative more strongly than the suburban communes. As for the rich peri-urban communes, they refused it. A link may also be observed with the dominant parties, given that the Left is more strongly represented in the core areas of major urban centres and the Right in their peripheral areas. The vote may also be interpreted from a more social

perspective, revealing a split between the richer regions that reject the initiative, because the residents here are more likely to become second home owners in the regions concerned, and the more modest lowland regions where the population can only benefit from such areas as daily visitors or hikers, and for whom the quality of the landscape is the most important consideration. Indeed, outside the Alps, there is a clear correlation between income level and the rate of rejection of the initiative. This being said, the differences remain, once again, surprisingly limited.

- 27 A more regional interpretation also reveals some interesting observations. Among the German-speaking towns, Basle, Winterthur and Schaffhausen score highest among the “yes” votes, with more than 60%. Here we find some traces of long-standing environmental struggles, such as those for the preservation of water resources or against nuclear energy. A third, less urban, region that came out very much in favour of the initiative is situated in the cantons of Bern, Neuchâtel and Solothurn, at the foot of the Jura and in the massif. In favour of landscape protection since the 1960s, having at that time blocked the spread of second homes by popular decisions at the cantonal level (Neuchâtel in 1966, Solothurn in 1970), this industrial population (living outside the large urban centres, often in family houses with a garden) has always had a caring attitude towards preservation of the natural environment and landscape.
- 28 Perhaps the most interesting analysis of all is based on the geography of the vote in the Alps, which finally helped to approve the initiative: there were interesting differences in behaviour. In the French-speaking Bas-Valais only 24.7% of voters accepted the proposal, but this percentage rose to 30.4% in the German-speaking Haut-Valais. Very low acceptance rates were observed in the Ticino valleys (Sopraceneri), as in the Surselva in Graubünden. Apart from Valais, rejection was strongest in the peripheral regions where there is no tourism or where it is only a recent phenomenon. In addition, these regions, including Valais, are characterised by highly fragmented land ownership structure, due to the egalitarian method of transmission that results in a large number of owners. In these regions, the tourism model is clearly based on the building of second homes, staggered over time and within the limits imposed by financing and the availability of local entrepreneurs. In the older tourist regions, particularly where there are hotels, the importance of landscape considerations and economic interests resulted in a strong minority, and even the majority in some cases, voting in favour of the Weber initiative. This was the case in Engadine, Davos, Flims, Zermatt and resorts in the Bernese Oberland.
- 29 The effect of the 20% threshold led to the situation where some communes that were still below this level accepted the initiative, possibly in the hope of benefiting from the ban on neighbouring communes that had already reached the threshold. This falsely protective attitude was found, for example, in the commune of Unteriberg and in the villages along the shores of Lake Thoun and Lake Brienz. Elsewhere, however, those communes that could have potentially benefited from the ban on neighbouring communes showed solidarity with the latter. However, it should be pointed out that often these communes have companies that are active elsewhere in the construction of second homes.

## The political consequences of accepting the initiative

- 30 At the moment of writing this article, only three months have lapsed since both the Swiss electorate and the cantons accepted the initiative “to put a stop to the invasive spread of second homes”. However, the political effects of this acceptance have already been major.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that this acceptance took place in a context that for some years now has been showing signs of a willingness to legislate more strictly in the field of land use planning, probably a corollary to the increasing importance of political ecology in Switzerland. This concern has also been reflected in the scientific field and for several decades now land use and land use changes have been the subject of a number of increasingly detailed studies (Jaeger *et al.* 2008, Perlik *et al.* 2008, Wissen Hayek *et al.* 2010, to mention but the most recent).

- 31 Historically, the Federal government was absent from the debate, and then very discrete even after the introduction in 1979 of the Spatial Planning Act, which had a relatively limited impact. Over the past decade, however, the Federal government has begun to intervene more directly in spatial planning procedures, particularly through the policy pertaining to large urban areas. While federal infrastructure funding was historically allocated project by project, the policy for agglomerations enabled the Confederation to make the allocation of these funds conditional on the cantons and communes of the urban areas concerned drawing up an overall planning policy. This new approach has enjoyed considerable success, since in less than ten years some fifty urban projects, covering all the country's urban areas, have been proposed with a view to obtaining federal funding – a subtle way of providing more outside input into planning and development in the cantons. In parallel, the introduction of the policy on large urban areas also gave recognition to the increasingly important role of the Federal spatial planning office. Created following the adoption of the Federal Planning Act, the Office at first had a largely advisory role or simply observed trends. Today it has become the increasingly powerful instrument for the application of federal directives in the field of spatial planning. In particular, it is the Office that evaluates the plans submitted for agglomeration development, and it is this evaluation that will determine the percentage of infrastructure costs to be borne by the Confederation.
- 32 Even with the increasing involvement of the federal government in planning and development, its role has been implicit rather than direct, through policies similar to that described above, through biotope protection measures, such as those resulting from the Rothenthurm initiative, or through sectoral policies, as in the field of rail and road infrastructures. The central area of spatial planning and development remained the prerogative of the cantons, and the latter took advantage of this to apply policies that were very different from one canton to another, ranging from strict control, in Geneva, Basle and Zurich for example, to much more liberal policies in terms of land consumption in most of the alpine cantons, Fribourg and the Jura (Perlik *et al.*, 2008).
- 33 It is in this respect that the vote on March 11 represents a turning point. It marks the acceptance by the electorate of a federal constitutional provision which nobody thought had any chance of succeeding, since it went against not only cantonal sovereignty and current practices, but also economic liberalism in land use. This acceptance shows that a majority of the electorate is now ready, in the name of landscape and land use protection, to go against the principles outlined above. In this way, the vote has indirectly given the Confederation absolute authority in an area that until now has been the exclusive reserve of the cantons.
- 34 We may now take stock of the indirect consequences. Firstly, a mental barrier seems to have been crossed and in both political debate and the minds of the population it now seems accepted that a verdict at the polling booth can help strengthen the role of planning in spatial development. This was admirably demonstrated on 17 June 2012 in

two cantonal votes, resulting, on the one hand, in the introduction of a 20% tax on any increase in the value of land following a change in land classification in the Canton of Thurgau and, on the other, in the return to the agricultural zone of more than 1000 ha of land previously classified as eligible for building in the Canton de Zurich.

- 35 This increasing awareness has also been observed on the political stage. First reactions following the surprise acceptance of the initiative on second homes took the form of bitter criticism of the government and both Houses for not having proposed a counter-project to the initiative, which could have moderated certain provisions. This criticism has been apparent during debates concerning another initiative due to be submitted to the vote, focussing on landscape preservation. This initiative proposes freezing current building zones for a period of 20 years and was also considered to have little chance of success, but following the March 11 vote the outcome is now not at all certain.
- 36 The federal assembly has therefore decided to propose a counter-project to this initiative that would strengthen the provisions of the Spatial Planning and Development Act. This will involve three areas. First, the principle is established that spatial planning should be based on the conservation of land and agricultural areas, giving priority to higher densities in urban areas and to zones well served by public transport. Second, only those building zones destined to absorb demographic and economic growth over the next 15 years can be maintained – any other buildable land will have to be downgraded. Finally, a minimum 20% tax will be levied on any increase in land values resulting from land being classified as eligible for building (Feuille Fédérale 2012/26, pp. 5531-6).
- 37 These provisions are part of a catalogue that political ecologists and, more generally, town and country planning authorities have been recommending for decades. While some of these principles were specifically described by the Act when it was introduced in 1979, particularly the call for higher densities and the protection of agricultural land (Recueil Systématique du Droit Fédéral, No. 700), the use of coercive limits involving the forced downgrading of building zones and especially the imposition of a land tax are part of a legislative arsenal that is entirely new at the federal level. At a time when the federal government is seeking to facilitate implementation of the second home initiative, namely with regard to the problems of transmission and succession – it is true that the text of the initiative is vague on these points –, the federal parliament is reacting to the eruption of the Confederation into the spatial planning field by strengthening its involvement, by revising the Spatial Planning and Development Act, in an effort to prevent the landscape initiative from being accepted.
- 38 Acceptance of this initiative could ultimately be considered as a major turning point in Swiss politics, both in the field of spatial planning and the development of the Alps – not without there being a few precedents, like the Rothenthurm and Alps initiatives. This latter development has not been smooth. Thus, the Federal Council, at the end of the summer of 2012, issued an implementation ordinance that placed emphasis on the demands of the losers in the March 11 vote, particularly concerning the effective involvement of the federal government in controlling construction, even though it had at first showed signs of resolve in the months following acceptance of the initiative. In this way, the government is instilling another link with the two earlier initiatives, introduced respectively 30 and 20 years ago, the application of which is still pending.
- 39 Two conclusions may already be proposed. The first is that through the 11 March vote the people have indicated their acceptance of stronger federal involvement in the field of

spatial planning and development, which they had already done several times in the past, and always to the general surprise.

- 40 The second, perhaps of greater concern, is that both the vote and the after-shocks accompanying its implementation reveal a country, government and people that are split into two camps. On the question of spatial planning and development, there is an old divide running between the proponents of stricter planning – protectors of the environment, the majority of the Left electorate, as well as the business community concerned with preserving the Swiss landscape as a national asset – and those more in favour of federal intervention in the planning field, namely the rural and alpine peripheries, and some of the wealthier classes of the population. It would appear that in today's metropolitan Switzerland, regional sensitivities are being increasingly ignored as the country becomes less egalitarian, but more competitive.

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## ABSTRACTS

The Alps have an important role in defining the Swiss national identity, and play a major part in forging the country's image from the beginning of tourism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In a federalist country which assigns large decision powers to the cantonal and communal levels, local and national interests as to how to develop this particular space can profoundly diverge. The vote held on March 11th, 2012 on the Franz Weber initiative introducing a ban on building new holiday residences in touristic communes was a blatant example of such an opposition. The success of the initiative, albeit with a tiny majority, was a great shock; its territorial imprint was evident, drawing a line between alpine and prealpine cantons on one side, and mainland cantons on the other side. This paper proposes a spatial analysis of this vote and put it in context through a historical perspective. Indeed, of all the votes held since 1950 with an environmental or landscape component, we can find only one with the same territorial pattern – in 1965, “against inflation in the building industry” – as the 2012 vote. In all the other votes held on those subjects, other splits – linguistic, religious, or regional – manifested themselves, allowing the alpine populations to find allies. This paper asks thus the question as to whether the long-lived solidarity of mainland Switzerland with the Alps tends to dissipate.

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